

## 2019 Easter Sunday: Life from the Ashes *by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle*

### Prayer of Illumination

O risen Christ, open us to the power of your resurrection as we hear it proclaimed anew this day, that we too might rise to new life in you.  
Amen.

### Scripture: Luke 24:1-12 (NRSV)

#### The Resurrection of Jesus

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – Life from the Ashes

Trees hold a thorny place in our Judeo-Christian faith. Trees were the cornerstone of the Garden of Eden, the first thing God created after Adam in Genesis 2.

Two trees in particular were mentioned—the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But it was this tree that enticed Adam and Eve to go out on a limb and disobey God's command so they might become like God.

Jesus himself, the Second Adam, had "issues" with trees that weren't fulfilling their mission, singling them out for cutting down or burning up if they didn't produce adequate fruit.

No wonder being hung "on a tree" became the ultimate stigma for a final separation from God's presence.

But the symbol of the tree itself was re-created on Golgotha. The crucifix upon which Jesus was nailed was made of old, dead wood. That wood was nailed together and "replanted" into the earth for the sole purpose of advancing more death. The dead wood was erected to put to death living flesh.

The Easter miracle of Jesus' resurrection declares that both the cross and its "curse" utterly failed to deliver death. The tree of death was transformed into a tree of life. What had been dead was made alive again. This is the essence of Easter. Dead wood becomes live flesh, living fruit. Though we were dead in our sins, Christ died for us that we might have life.

I learned from Leonard Sweet about the Are-ray-nal (Arenal) volcano in Costa Rica. It boasts one of the youngest and most active volcanoes in the world and it's a tourist mecca. The eruptions constantly spew ash and the flow of lava covers the region. So far, Are-ray-nal has been fairly predictable and contained—and so it's safe for tourists to visit and enjoy.

As the volcano continues to burp, it deposits layers of ash and lava across that region. Believe it or not, the lands and landscape are vastly enriched by these mineral deposits. Soils rich in lava are some of the best soils in the world: think Kona coffee, in Hawaii. Or pineapples.

One of the most unique and unexpected results of this rain of volcanic flow and ash is an amazing expression of life. Usually geologists and agricultural scientists look at the results of volcanic activity from the distance of millennia, or at the least centuries. But in Costa Rica there are surprising results from the volcanic activity of just a few dozen years.

Within the region of the volcano there's a startling symbol of not just rebirth of old ground, but of agricultural "resurrection." The old established fence lines in this region began to take on new life. The richness of the volcanic ash and soil so empowered the soil that not only did new crops begin to flourish, but the fences that hemmed in the field took on new life.

So much ash accumulated on top of and around the old “dead” wooden fence posts in this region that they were “reborn.” In other words, the dead fence posts were “resurrected” into a newly invigorated living substance. The result was that within the region of the Are-ray-nal volcano in Costa Rica, one can find “growing” “reborn” fence posts.

Living fence posts.

They’re known to locals and to the tourists that come to see them as “fence trees.” The old “dead” wood has been so richly fertilized by the volcanic spew that it’s literally become alive again. The fence lines in this region in Costa Rica are lined not with dead posts, but with posts that have sprouted living trees out of their dead-end, post-hole existence.

Against all odds, new roots have been urged out of “dead” posts, as new shoots have sprouted out of the tops of hacked-off wood. The region around the Are-ray-nal volcano has sprouted living fences—dead wood sticks resurrected and brought back to life by the volcanic power of resurrection.

Hear the good news Immanuel:

The crucified Christ has over-powered death once and for all. Jesus is our risen Lord.

Jesus is also our rising Lord. He’s alive and well and very active. And he’s made the deadwood of our lives into living trees. Jesus blew out of that volcano of death and hell so that we might live again—that the dead in us might come to life. And he blows out of whatever volcanos of death and hell are erupting in your life right now to bring you, right now, this day, to new life and into a new relationship with reality and your Redeemer.

Can you hear it blow?

Can you register its tremors and feel the heat?

Can you feel it shake and rock you to the very depths of your soul?

This Easter, the living crucified Christ, transforms death into life, and gives us abundant, resurrection life—today and always.

**Amen.**

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